

# DOMINGUEZ-ESCALANTE

## NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

Manager's Annual Report  
Fiscal Year 2014

BLM

Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area • COLORADO

NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS





# Table of Contents

---

1	Dominguez-Escalante Profile	2
2	Planning and NEPA	5
3	Year's Projects and Accomplishments	6
4	Science	9
5	Resources, Objects, Values, and Stressors	10
6	Summary of Performance Measures	16
7	Manager's Letter	17

# 1 Dominguez-Escalante NCA Profile

---

## Designating Authority

**Designating Authority:** Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009 (Public Law 111-11), March 30, 2009.

## Acreage

Total Acres in Unit	BLM Acres	Other Fed. Acres	State Acres	Other Acres
218,394	210,149	0	1,965	6,280

## Contact Information

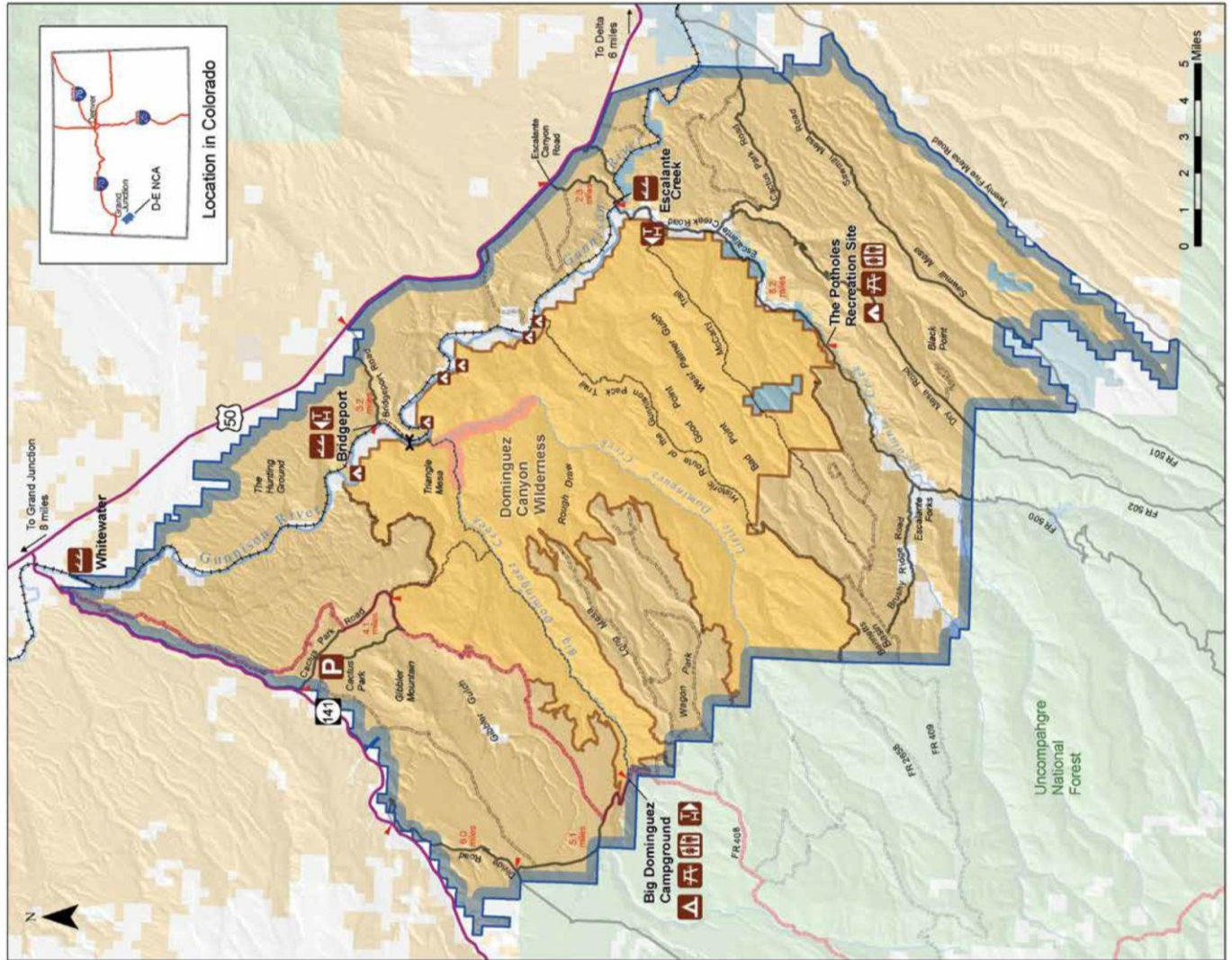
Unit Manager	Phone	E-mail	Mailing Address
Collin Ewing	970-244-3000	cewing@blm.gov	2815 H Road, Grand Junction, CO 81501

Field Office	District Office	State Office
Grand Junction	Northwest	Colorado

## Budget

Total FY14 Budget	Subactivity 1711	Other Subactivities' Contributions	Other Funding
\$605,000	\$435,000	1610- \$110,000 1210- \$48,000 1220- \$0 1020 -\$10,000 3130 -\$2,000	

# Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area



## Map of Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area



## Staffing

The permanent staff of the Dominguez-Escalante NCA (D-E NCA) consists of an NCA manager (currently shared with McInnis Canyons NCA), a science ecologist (a joint position that also supports Gunnison Gorge and McInnis Canyons NCAs), a law enforcement officer (shared with McInnis Canyons NCA), and an outdoor recreation planner. The staff supporting the planning effort includes a planning and environmental coordinator and a writer-editor. In FY 2014, seasonal staff included two river rangers shared with the Uncompahgre Field Office and two recreation maintenance interns shared with McInnis Canyons NCA and Grand Junction Field Office.

The NCA receives special recreation permit administration, facilities maintenance and other program support from the Grand Junction and Uncompahgre Field Offices, primarily in the areas of visitor services and contact; geology and paleontology, cultural resources, range management, wildlife biology, ecology, weed management, geographic information systems (GIS), and soil, water, and air quality.





# 2 Planning and NEPA

---

## **Status of RMP**

The Omnibus Public Lands Act of 2009 directed the BLM to develop a Resource Management Plan for the D-E NCA According to the Act:

The management plan shall—

- (1) Describe the appropriate uses and management of the Conservation Area;
- (2) Be developed with extensive public input;
- (3) Take into consideration any information developed in studies of the land within the Conservation Area; and
- (4) Include a comprehensive travel management plan.

In 2014 the local office, the community, our cooperating agencies, and the Dominguez-Escalante Advisory Council worked diligently toward completion of the new RMP. In 2014 the BLM analyzed comments received from the public during the comment period on the Draft RMP/Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Based on those comments BLM made changes to the Preferred Alternative to develop the Proposed RMP. D-E NCA has drafted the Final Environmental Impact Statement and expects to release the PRMP/FEIS for a 30 day protest period and 60 review by the Governor of Colorado in 2015. After protests are resolved D-E NCA will issue the Approved RMP and Record of Decision.

An implementation strategy and activity plans will follow.

## **Status of Activity Plans**

The NCA staff is currently working on a comprehensive travel management plan as part of the resource management plan.

In the meantime, we are managing the NCA under the direction of the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Act, 2010 Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Interim Management Policy, 1987 Grand junction RMP, and the 1989 Uncompahgre basin RMP.

# 3 Year's Projects and Accomplishments

---

## **General Accomplishments**

### **Bighorn Sheep Study**

In 2014, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and BLM continued their collaborative study of Bighorn Sheep movements in the NCA. This year CPW captured and collared five rams near Escalante Canyon and 4 ewes and a ram between Roubideau Canyon and Big Dominguez Canyon. These sheep were fitted with GPS collars and are providing managers with valuable data about the range and habitat use of sheep subpopulations.

### **Sage Grouse Habitat Assessments**

The D-E NCA staff conducted Habitat Assessment Framework data collection within all designated critical habitat for the Gunnison sage-grouse. This data has been compiled in GIS to determine the current level of suitability of habitat in the area.

### **Archeological Site protection on Big Dominguez Creek**

This year, BLM archeology and recreation staff was able to complete a post-and-rail fence at the mouth of Big Dominguez Creek. This fence was put in place in order to protect historic deposits from recreational and cattle grazing.



## **Current Areas of Focus**

### **D-E NCA RMP development**

For FY 2014, the major focus for NCA staff was continuing the development of the D-E NCA resource management plan. Once the public comment period for the draft plan was over, the NCA's interdisciplinary planning team began an intensive review process to analyze all public comments and consider whether to make changes to the RMP on the basis of what the public had to say. This review, which includes the creation of a comprehensive travel management plan, will continue into FY 2015.

## **Education, Outreach, and Interpretation**

### **Colorado Canyons Association Scavenger Hunt**

The Colorado Canyons Association, in partnership with the BLM, held the NCA's third scavenger hunt on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014. This scavenger hunt was attended by 125 third-grade students from Delta area elementary schools. There were ten stations representing different NCA values in Escalante Canyon. BLM and volunteers from several partner organizations (including Palisade Insectary, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Western Colorado Interpretive Association, and others) operated multiple station where students learned about cultural resource, ranching history, Leave No Trace ethics, wildlife, biological soil crusts, biological controls for invasive plants, and other resources in the NCA.





## **Partnerships**

### **Colorado Canyons Association**

In 2014, BLM actively partnered with CCA to host multiple events throughout the NCA including youth education, citizen science projects and volunteer opportunities.

### **Partners of Delta, Montrose and Ouray Counties**

In FY 2014, the BLM staff partnered with the “Partners Program” to host around 20 children from the organization in a Take-Outside Event. During this event the kids were able to spend the day on the Gunnison River and in Dominguez Canyon with BLM river rangers and staff.

### **Delta County corrections work program**

Inmates from the Delta County Detention Facility, a BLM partner, assisted with construction and maintenance of recreational facilities, and with removal of trash in the D-E NCA.

### **Colorado Mesa University Public Lands Economics Study**

D-E NCA is participating in a study with many community partners including Colorado mesa university and the Grand valley trails Alliance . This partnership is in the early stages of planning a study to focus on the economic and social values of public land in our region including within the National Conservation Areas.

### **Other partnerships**

The D-E NCA also closely collaborated with the Interpretative Association of Western Colorado, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Museum of the West, Geological Society of America and Colorado Mesa University on several educational and scientific projects.

## **Volunteers**

### **D-E NCA Advisory Council**

The 10-member Dominguez-Escalante Advisory Council met six times in FY 2013, spending 138 hours reviewing the Draft RMP and listening to public comments on the Draft.

### **Gunnison River Cleanup**

This year Colorado Canyons Association hosted our first Gunnison River Cleanup. About 40 community volunteers attended this event.



2014 Gunnison River Cleanup volunteers

# 4 Science

## **Riparian monitoring: a volunteer citizen science project**

In FY 2014, the Colorado Canyons Association (CCA) continues to work under agreement with the BLM to perform riparian monitoring in the NCA, with a focus on Big Dominguez Canyon. The purpose of this multi-year study is to measure the health of riparian ecosystems. The BLM and Colorado Canyons Association staff will train citizen scientists to collect data for a baseline inventory and monitor plants and other indicators.

The CCA plans to develop a replicable research model for using volunteer citizen scientists in the NCA using a technique called “verified citizen science.” Volunteers trained as “experts” in monitoring will collect data, and the CCA will compare the data they collect to those collected by BLM ecologists to make sure it is consistent. Future training will be modified depending on the results of this comparison.



## **Salt Desert restoration**

In FY 2014, Upper Colorado Native Plant Center met with BLM staff from Montrose and Grand Junction to collect native seeds from around Escalante Canyon. The collected eight species (Shadscale, Four Wing, Rabbitbrush, Winterfat, Bigelow Sage, Greasewood, Mat saltbush, and Gardner saltbush) of native seed to dry and clean.



## **Bighorn Sheep**

In FY 2014, Colorado Parks and Wildlife continued a study of Bighorn Sheep within the NCA. This is an ongoing study that started in the Spring of 2012. During this time they have been able to capture and collar 18 bighorn sheep in the area. In the Winter of 2014, CPW was able to capture and collar 4 ewes and 1 ram between Roubideau Canyon and Dominguez Canyon. In 2015, they plan to continue with capturing and collaring bighorn within the NCA.

Winter 2014 bighorn sheep collaring.



### **White-tailed Prairie Dog Study**

In May 2014, Colorado Mesa University partnered with the BLM to conduct a study of the parasites of two populations of white-tailed prairie dogs. This study is being designed to determine the impact of parasite activity on prairie dog health and behavior.

### **Other ongoing scientific projects in the D-E NCA:**

- Ecological effects of stream drying under climate change in the Upper Colorado River Basin
- Desert bighorn sheep population study
- National rivers and streams assessment
- A survey of the species composition and distribution of byrophilous tardigrades in the high desert environments of Western Colorado
- Gunnison sage-grouse Pinyon Mesa population models

## **5 Resources, Objects, Values, and Stressors**

---

### **Natural and cultural resources, including wildlife, riparian, archaeological, and historical values**

Natural and cultural resources are among the 14 purposes of the Dominguez-Escalante NCA listed in its enabling legislation. The NCA enjoys an extraordinary abundance of these resources, including an array of rare and common plant and animal species as well as prehistoric and historic sites and artifacts.

The NCA's natural and cultural resource management staff focuses on clearly communicating the importance of conserving and protecting NCA values and expanding the BLM's understanding of NCA resources through assessment, inventory and monitoring.

### **Accomplishments**

#### **Cultural**

In FY 2014, D-E NCA cultural resource staff helped with multiple educational events for youth and families on the river and around Big Dominguez Creek. Through these events the cultural staff was able to educate 38 individuals. In addition to public education and outreach, staff was able to complete 40 acres of surveying using Class I Cultural Resource Sensitivity Predictive Model and GIS information. D-E NCA staff also constructed a historic looking post-and-rail fence to protect historical sensitive deposits by the mouth of Big Dominguez Creek.

#### **Riparian**

In FY 2014, BLM staff was able to monitor 15 miles of cottonwood creek within D-E NCA. Along with monitoring Cottonwood Creek staff was also able to start monitoring of Big Dominguez Creek.

#### **Wildlife**

During FY 2014, BLM staff and partners were able to inventory 17,700 acres for the Gunnison Sage Grouse Habitat Assessment.

### Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object or Value	Status	Trend
Cultural (Includes archaeological and historical)	Good	Stable
Natural	Varies depending on species or habitat	Unknown
Wildlife	Good	Stable
Riparian	Varies depending on species	Unknown

### Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 14
Cultural (includes archaeological and historical)	210,000	42,160	3,000	10
Natural	210,000	210,000	68,000	68,000
Wildlife	210,000	210,000	210,000	0
Riparian	210,000	179,218	3,300	218

### Stressors Affecting natural and cultural resources

Stresses on natural and cultural resources and values include (human-caused) wildland fire invasive plants, recreational use, improper livestock grazing and domestic livestock diseases, loss of habitat, habitat fragmentation, air pollution, non-native animals, water pollution, theft, surface disturbance, and vandalism.





## Water Resources

One of the 14 purposes of the NCA listed in its enabling legislation is “the water resources of area streams, based on seasonally available flows, that are necessary to support aquatic, riparian, and terrestrial species and communities” (Section 2402 of the Omnibus Act). There are 115 miles of rivers and streams in the NCA, including the Escalante, Cottonwood, Little and Big Dominguez Creeks, and nearly 30 miles of the Gunnison River. These aquatic resources support an abundance of fish, wildlife and recreational opportunities as well as the existing water rights of neighboring landowners.

BLM staff members in this program area work to expand understanding of these resources through assessment, inventory and monitoring, while actively participating in planning and public outreach.

### Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object or Value	Status	Trend
Water Resources	Good Overall	Stable and improving

### Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 14
Water Resources	210,000	210,000	3,300	182

### Stressors Affecting water resources

Water resources may be affected by invasive aquatic plants, diversion, erosion, recreational use, livestock grazing, and air and water pollution.



Big Dominguez Creek

## Recreational resources, including wilderness and scenic values

Recreation is listed as one of the 14 purposes of the NCA in its enabling legislation, and visitors to the NCA can participate in an exceptionally wide variety of recreational activities, including hunting, hiking, boating, horseback riding, off-highway vehicle (OHV) travel, rock climbing, wildlife viewing and camping. Visitors can also enjoy a broad range of recreational settings, including remote wilderness, riparian wetlands, and culturally or historically significant sites.

The BLM's recreation staff assists in planning for and managing recreational resources and facilities in a manner that conserves National Conservation Lands and NCA values. Thus, roads and other facilities are built only when necessary for public health and safety, for exercise of existing rights, to minimize impacts to resources, or to otherwise further the purposes for which the NCA was designated. Recreation staff members actively engage stakeholders through the land-use planning process to help identify existing and potential uses that are compatible with the legislated purposes of the NCA, and the BLM practices a community-based approach to providing recreational services that is consistent with the purposes of the NCA and the socioeconomic goals of adjacent or nearby communities.

### Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object or Value	Status	Trend
Recreational	Good	Stable
Wilderness	Good	Stable
Scenic	Good	Stable

### Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 14
Recreational	210,000	210,000	210,000	210,000
Wilderness	210,000	210,000	68,000	68,000
Scenic	210,000	210,000	210,000	0





### **Stressors Affecting recreational resources**

Recreational resources and values may be adversely affected by any of the stressors that affect natural and cultural resources, because recreational visitors to the NCA often go there expecting (for example) to see pristine habitat, healthy wildlife, or undamaged rock art. Recreational use itself can damage recreational resources where some recreational user experiences are negatively impacted by other forms of recreation. Right-of-way proximity and air pollution may also threaten the integrity of the recreational experiences.

### **Scientific, geological, and paleontological resources**

The geological and paleontological resources of the NCA are listed in the NCA's enabling legislation as among its purposes, and these resources are exceptionally abundant in the NCA. Scientific study of these resources benefits the scientific community as a whole and effectively informs the BLM's management of the NCA. The NCA staff works to identify research needs, encourage science partnerships and citizen science, and incorporate scientific results into management, decision-making and outreach.

BLM staff members promote the NCA to universities and research institutions as an outdoor research, educational laboratory and potential demonstration center for emerging technology and innovative management practices. In turn, academic institutions, aware of the unique and valuable resources in the NCA, seek out partnerships with the BLM to conduct scientific research and education in the NCA.

### **Accomplishments**

In FY 2014, seven new dinosaur track-way sites have been found. Of these seven we have been able to inventory four of them. Through these and other surveys D-E NCA have been shown to have possibly the highest consideration of dinosaur tracks within the nation.

### **Status and Trend Table**

<b>Resource, Object or Value</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Trend</b>
Scientific	Good	Stable
Geological (Precambrian to Quaternary rocks)	Good	Very Stable
Paleontological (Scientifically important vertebrate fossils)	Good	Stable and Improving (more sites found every year)

### **Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table**

<b>Resource, Object, or Value</b>	<b>Acres in Unit</b>	<b>Acres Inventoried</b>	<b>Acres Possessing Object</b>	<b>Acres Monitored in FY 14</b>
Scientific	210,000	90,007	210,000	90,007
Geological	210,000	210,000	126,000	0
Paleontological	210,000	158,150	1,507	10

### **Stressors Affecting- scientific, geological and paleontological resources**

Scientific resources are affected by anything that affects geological, cultural, paleontological, biological, or wildlife resources. Geological and paleontological resources are primarily affected by theft and vandalism.

## Education

Educational resources are cited as one of the 14 purposes of the NCA in its enabling legislation, and they span the gamut of all the other resources in the NCA, which are all suitable as subjects for interpretive and educational activities.

The BLM strives to provide young people with opportunities to engage in recreation and practice stewardship on NCA lands and to learn about NCA resources and land management. BLM staff members seek out partnerships with local schools and educators to help them interpret National Conservation Lands and NCA values. The BLM provides interpretive and educational materials to NCA users through the Grand Junction and Uncompahgre field offices and the NCA website.

### Accomplishments

In FY 2014, BLM was able to partner with CCA to host our third annual scavenger hunt. Through this event we were able to educate third grade students from Delta County. BLM staff was also able to partner with Partners of Delta, Montrose and Ouray counties to provide children with a wonderful opportunity of rafting down the Gunnison River.

### Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object or Value	Status	Trend
Education	Good	Stable

### Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 14
Education	210,000	210,000	210,000	1,000

### Stressors Affecting Educational resources

Virtually all of the resources of the NCA can be considered educational resources. However, interpretive signs, kiosk and cultural sites are very susceptible to vandalism.



# 6 Summary of Performance Measure

<b>Dominguez-Escalante NCA Resource Status</b>		
<b>Resource, Object, or Value</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Trend</b>
Cultural	Good	Stable
Natural	Varies Depending on species or habitat	Unknown
Wildlife	Good	Stable
Riparian	Varies depending on species or habitat	Unknown
Water resources	Varies depending on resource	Unknown
Recreational	Good	Stable
Wilderness	Good	Stable
Scenic	Good	Stable
Geological (Precambrian to Quaternary rocks)	Good	Very Stable
Paleontological (Scientifically important vertebrate fossils)	Good	Stable and improving (more sites found every year)
Educational	Good	Stable
Scientific	Good	Stable

\*This table is a synthesis of the individual object/value status tables in the “Objects, Values, and Stressors” section.



# 7 Manager's Letter

---

This year was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wilderness Act, so I'd like to reflect on what wilderness means to me. I had my first wilderness experiences in the forests on the Front Range of Colorado. Backpacking and fishing with my dad in the Rawah, Comanche Peak, and Rocky Mountain National Park Wilderness Areas fueled my love for public lands, and led me to the career path that brought me here. While my love for the outdoors and all things natural has not changed since those amazing wilderness experiences in my childhood, my understanding of "Wilderness" is still in its formative stage.



I am a rangeland ecologist by education, a rangeland management specialist, biologist, and planner/environmental coordinator by trade. Through those lenses I have always seen Wilderness as a great biological resource, where wildlife and ecosystems were protected from development. However in my time in the National Conservation Areas here in western Colorado I have learned that protection of biological resources is only a small part of what Wilderness is all about.

At this point in my life and career I have come to the following realizations: Wilderness is as much a social resource as it is a biological one. Wilderness is about humility and restraint. It is about realizing that my existence is relatively unimportant to the natural forces at play in the world, and that the earth couldn't care less whether I eat, drink or sleep again. Wilderness is about finding the person I would have been, had I been born during almost any other period in humanity's existence, prior to the invention of agriculture and the wheel. Wilderness is about hiding my car keys and cell phone at the bottom of a backpack, pannier, ammo can or dry bag and focusing on real life, ensuring my family and I have adequate food, water and cover to survive the night or ride out the rain storm and still remain in good spirits or at least appreciate the adventure.

Our public lands provide unlimited benefits to all Americans from producing meat (wild or domestic) to clean water, from providing outstanding motorized and non-motorized recreation activities to enabling important scientific discoveries. I am extremely fortunate to be able to make a career of managing public lands for multiple uses and sustained yield. Protecting these priceless Wilderness Areas for my children, for yours, and for the future of our society is vital to meeting our multiple-use mandate. In the next 50 years, I am committed to furthering my academic and spiritual understanding of Wilderness so I can be a good steward of these Wilderness Areas ensuring that future visitors can truly experience a landscape untrammelled by humans, where natural processes shape the landscape, and outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive, unconfined recreation abound.

-Collin Ewing, NCA Manager



# NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Dominguez-Escalante  
National Conservation Area  
2815 H Road, Grand Junction, CO 81506  
Phone: (970) 244-3000

Bureau of Land Management  
Grand Junction Field Office  
2815 H Road  
Grand Junction, CO 81506  
Phone: (970) 244-3000